



PHASCOLOMYS WOMBAT, *Per. et Les*

*Strobel and McC. Richter, del. et lith.*

*Hellmannel & Walton, Imp.*

## PHASCOLOMYS WOMBAT, *Pér. et Les.*

### Wombat.

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#### HEAD, OF THE SIZE OF LIFE.

I WISH it to be understood that, an interval of eighteen years having passed away between the commencement and termination of the present work, there may be some instances in which opinions expressed in years gone by now require modification. When I published the reduced figures of this animal, I remarked that it was uncertain whether there was more than one species of the genus *Phascolomys*. I now, in 1863, feel confident that there are three, if not four, quite distinct Wombats—one inhabiting Tasmania, or Van Diemen's Land, and certainly two, if not three, the opposite portion of the Australian continent.

The life-sized portrait given on the opposite Plate was taken from a Van Diemen's Land animal. It will be seen that it is very dark in colour—a feature common, I believe, to most of the specimens in that island; I have, however, heard of lighter-coloured examples being occasionally seen, but none have come under my own observation. It will be observed that, independently of the difference of colour, it is a small animal when compared with *P. latifrons*. I would call the attention of Professor M'Coy and others who have opportunities of studying the Wombats in their native country to the importance of investigating their history, since it is to them that the mammalogists of Europe must look for accurate information on the subject: and this should be done speedily; for, like the Badger in England, these large and singular Marsupials will soon become scarce.

My figure was taken from an individual which lived for many years in the menagerie of the Zoological Society of London.







PHASCOLOMYS WOMBAT, Per et Les.

*Richardson & Webster, Imp.*

*Illustrated by E. Mearns, del. et lith.*

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## Wombat.

- Phascolomys Wombat*, Peron et Lesueur, Voy. aux Terres Australes, Atlas, tab. 28.—Desm. Mamm., part i. p. 276.—  
Waterh. in Jard. Nat. Lib. Mamm., vol. x. p. 300.—Ib. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 246.—Gunn  
in Proc. of Roy. Soc. of Van Diem. Land, vol. ii. p. 85.  
————— *fossor*, Sevastianoff in Mém. de l'Acad. Imp. de St. Pétersb., tom. i. p. 444.  
————— *wombatus*, Leach, Zool. Misc., vol. ii. p. 101. pl. 96.  
————— *fusca*, Desm. Dict. des Sci. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 500. tab. G 44. fig. 1.  
————— *Bassii*, Less. Man. du Mamm., p. 229.  
————— *ursinus*, Gray, List of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 95.  
*Didelphis ursina*, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. i. part ii. p. 504.  
*Wombatus fossor*, Geoff.  
*Opossum hirsutum*, Perry, Arcana.  
*Amblotis fossor*, Ill. Prod., p. 77.  
*Perameles fossor*, Peron.  
*Womback*, Bewick's Quadr., 6th Edit. p. 522.  
*Wombat*, Collins's Account of New South Wales, vol. ii. p. 153, and plate at p. 157.  
*Badger*, of the Colonists.
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THE Wombat may be regarded as one of the most curious of the Australian Mammals, ranking as it does, in respect to its anomalous structure and appearance, with the Koala and Ornithorhynchus. In no other part of the world is the form to be found, and it is difficult to say of which of the great groups of placental animals it is the representative in its own class—the *Marsupiatæ*. I obtained several examples in Van Diemen's Land, but failed in procuring continental specimens, which I regret, because it leaves the question as to there being more than one species of this form still undecided; nor can this point be determined until specimens from South Australia have been sent to Europe, or until comparisons have been made in that country by a naturalist competent to set the question at rest. Professor Owen informs us that a skull in the Collection of the Royal College of Surgeons, sent from South Australia, offers sufficient differences from skulls from Van Diemen's Land to convince him that there are at least two species; and when such a statement is made by so high an authority, the doubt that exists on the subject is much diminished. Mr. Waterhouse also states, that in his opinion the continental species will prove to be distinct from the animal found in Van Diemen's Land and the islands in Bass's Straits. I may mention also that His Excellency Sir George Grey has placed in my hands a pencil drawing of the head of a specimen killed in South Australia, to which, from the great breadth of the head, the name of *latifrons*, proposed by Professor Owen for the continental animal, might apply. There appears, therefore, good reasons for concluding that the continental animal is really distinct; but the question still remains an open one, and it is much to be regretted that both skins and skeletons have not been sent home, for its proper elucidation. After what has been stated, it is almost superfluous to say, that my figure was taken from a specimen procured in Van Diemen's Land, where the animal, particularly in certain districts, is extremely common. I met with it myself in the neighbourhood of Port Arthur, in the sterile districts behind Mount Wellington, and in many other situations where a similar character of country prevails. It is also found in the islands in Bass's Straits, where the specimen first described, in "Collins's Voyage," vol. ii. p. 153, was procured. In its habits it is nocturnal, living in the deep stony burrows, excavated by itself, during the day, and emerging on the approach of evening, but seldom trusting itself far from its stronghold, to which it immediately runs for safety on the appearance of an intruder. The natives state, however, that it sometimes indulges in a long ramble, and, if a river should cross its course, quietly walks into the water and traverses the bottom of the stream until it reaches the other side; but I am unable to confirm this statement from personal observation. In its disposition it is quiet and docile in the extreme, soon becoming familiar with and apparently attached to those who feed it; as an evidence of which, I may mention that the two specimens which are now (1855), and have been for a long period, living in the Gardens of the Zoological Society in the Regent's Park, not only admit the closest inspection, but may be handled and scratched by all who choose to make so intimate an acquaintance with them. The following notes are from the pens of various authors who have written on the Wombat; the earliest of whom was Mr. Bass, in "Collins's Voyage" above referred to.

"The *Wombat*," says Mr. Bass, "is a squat, thick, short-legged, and rather inactive quadruped. Its figure and movements strongly remind one of those of a Bear; its pace, too, is hobbling or shuffling, and not unlike the awkward gait of that animal. In disposition it is mild and gentle, but it bites hard and becomes furious when provoked, and then utters a low cry between a hissing and a whizzing sound, which

cannot be heard at a greater distance than thirty or forty yards." Mr. Bass chased one of these animals, lifted it off the ground and laid it along his arm, as if carrying a child. It made no noise, nor any effort to escape, not even a struggle. Its countenance was placid and undisturbed, and it exhibited no discomposure, although in the course of a mile walk it was frequently shifted from arm to arm, and sometimes laid over the shoulder; when, however, he proceeded to secure it by tying its legs, while he left it to cut a specimen of a new wood, it became irritated, whizzed, kicked and scratched most furiously, and snapped off a piece from the elbow of Mr. Bass's jacket with its powerful incisors. Its temper being now ruffled, it remained implacable all the way to the boat, ceasing to kick and struggle only when quite exhausted.

Mr. G. Bennett in his "Wanderings," speaking of one of these animals, kept in a state of domestication at Been in the Tumat country, states that "it would remain in its habitation till dark; it would then come out and seek for the milk-vessels, and should none be uncovered, it would contrive to get off the covers and bathe itself in the milk, drinking at the same time. It would also enter the little vegetable garden attached to the station in search of lettuces, for which it evinced much partiality. If none could be found, it would gnaw the cabbage stalks, without touching the leaves. Although this animal is very numerous in the more distant parts of the colony, it is difficult to procure from the great depth to which it burrows."

"The specimen dissected by Sir Everard Home," says Mr. Waterhouse, "and which was brought from one of the islands in Bass's Straits by Mr. Brown, the eminent botanist, lived as a domestic pet in the house of Mr. Clift for two years. This animal was a male, measured two feet and two inches in length, and weighed about twenty pounds. The observations made by Sir Everard Home on the habits of this animal whilst in confinement, correspond pretty closely with those already given. 'It burrowed in the ground whenever it had an opportunity, and covered itself in the earth with surprising quickness; it was very quiet during the day, but constantly in motion in the night; was very sensible to cold; ate all kinds of vegetables, but was particularly fond of new hay, which it ate stalk by stalk, taking it into its mouth, like a Beaver, by small bits at a time. It was not wanting in intelligence, and appeared attached to those to whom it was accustomed, and who were kind to it. When it saw them it would put up its fore paws on their knees, and when taken up would sleep in the lap. It allowed children to pull and carry it about, and when it bit them, it did not appear to do it in anger or with violence.'"

This animal, like almost every other of the Australian quadrupeds, is eaten by the natives, but as an article of food it must give place to the Kangaroo and its affines. I partook of it myself, but always found its flesh tough, with a musky flavour, and not altogether agreeable.

Mr. Bass remarks that the size of the two sexes is nearly the same, but that the female is somewhat the heavier, and such appears to be the case; the weight, whenever ascertained, being always in favour of the female.

In Mr. Gunn's paper on the Mammals indigenous to Tasmania, published in the "Proceedings of the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land," above referred to, that gentleman states that—"The Wombats of Tasmania differ much in colour in different localities, some being dirty black, and others of a silvery grey. They are found on the tops of the mountains, and thence to the sea-coasts; and are very numerous in some localities, 234 having been killed in less than a year upon a farm, at present occupied by me, on the St. Patrick's River."

For the details of the internal structure of this curious animal, I must refer my readers to the "Leçons d'Anatomie Comparée" of the celebrated Cuvier, and to the writings of our equally well-known countrymen, Sir Everard Home, in the "Philosophical Transactions" for 1808, and Professor Owen, in the "Proceedings of the Zoological Society" for 1836. The original memoir of the latter author, on *Phascolomys latifrons*, will be found in the "Proceedings" of the same Society for 1845.

The general hue of the tolerably long and very coarse fur of this animal is grey-brown; next the skin, the hairs of the ordinary fur of the upper surface are dusky brown, with the exposed portion of a dirty white, but the longer and coarser hairs are black at the point; on the under surface the hairs are dusky at the root, and dirty white for the remainder of their length, the general hue being paler than that of the upper surface; the muffle is naked and black; the small pointed ears are well clothed with hairs; the legs are short and strong, and the feet broad, naked beneath, and covered with minute, round, fleshy tubercles; the claws are large; those of the fore feet solid, or not concave beneath, slightly curved and depressed; those of the hind feet are curved, slightly compressed, and concave beneath; the hairs of the moustaches are numerous, strong and black, as are also some long bristly hairs which spring from the cheeks; the tail is a mere tubercle, and is hidden by the fur.

"The skeleton," says Mr. Waterhouse, "presents certain peculiarities well worthy of attention: the number of its ribs, and consequently of its dorsal vertebræ, is unusually large, being fifteen, whilst twelve or thirteen are usually found in the Marsupialia; the body of the atlas vertebra remains permanently cartilaginous; the humerus, besides having the inner condyle perforated, has an opening between the condyles; and the patella, or knee-bone, is wanting."

The Plates represent the head of the natural size, and the entire animal considerably reduced.